

Public Hearing- Commission on Children, Human Services

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Good Afternoon,

I would like to testify today against the proposed elimination of the Commission on Children. I am currently a student at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. Children are, by definition, the most vulnerable population. They cannot advocate for themselves without the support of adults to make their voice heard, they lack the right to vote, and are reliant on adults for basic human rights. I hope to give you reason enough to reconsider eliminating the Commission, not because we need it, but because the children need it. Our responsibility as voters, community members, parents, teachers, and students is to the children.

The Commission advocates on behalf of children in the state of Connecticut. The main incentives include providing information and conducting research on the status of children and children's programs; improving services and policies for children, and making recommendations for children annually to the legislature and the Governor. It is perhaps that the Commission has not been used to its full potential, rather than elimination, it should be reassessed and utilized.

The Commission is a particularly valuable resource because of the number of topics the Commission is able to address. Successful programming includes but certainly is not limited to:

Finding Federal Dollars	The Commission locates funding opportunities that brings federal dollars to Connecticut, including: the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Contingency Fund, valued at \$53 million; the Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) 50/50 match fund, valued at \$2.5million; and Medicaid payment for home visitation, valued at \$7 million.
Bring Parents to the Policy Table	The Commission develops a family civics initiative that teaches parents how to lead for children. The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) is in 16 cities and towns and replicated in other states. Graduates invest more than 1.5 million volunteer hours for children. Parent SEE (ParentSupporting Education Excellence) is in 9 towns.
Prevention – A Pound of Cure	The National Crime Prevention Council selects the Commission to guide Connecticut on prevention policy. Resulting from this, state leaders seek to shift 10 percent of the state budget from crisis to prevention.
Poverty Reduction	The Commission leads on landmark policy to reduce child poverty by 50 percent within ten years. A Child Poverty and Prevention Council is charged with specific benchmarks and outcome measures to track progress.
Safety and Learning	The Commission leads on anti-bullying strategies to ensure every child learns without fear. Model programs are started and dollars raised to match state investments in safe schools. An after school network is established to ensure learning and safety in non-school hours. Disney and Mott foundations partner on this effort.

Adapted From http://www.cga.ct.gov/COC/PDFs/about/COC_factsheet.pdf

I would like to speak to you through experiences in Hartford where the Commission could be utilized to revitalize the community in a way no other agency has the ability. I have had the privilege to intern at a local therapeutic horseback riding stable in the Northend of Hartford; Ebony Horsewomen Incorporated. As an intern I serve as a community organizer for the direct community. The difference in environment of communities in Connecticut, both physical and social in such small span of space is

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amazing. Areas of wealth are located within mere miles of impoverished areas that experience high rates of crime and violence.

On a housing website, Hartford is rated an 8 on a scale of 1 to 10 for safety with 1 being the safest. The first week of October 2009 two young men were found shot to death within two blocks of EHI. Contrary to the tragic deaths that plague our nightly news, these young men's tragic death did not make mainstream media. Deaths from gang violence and conflict are far too common for the children in the Northeast district. The children of Hartford are more likely to attend a funeral than their own graduation. The children in Hartford are plagued with fear of death and the need to defend themselves rather than being given the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

If used to the full potential the Commission on Children can be an asset to the entire state, not only to Hartford. The Commission tackles issues of violence, crime, poverty, children's rights, parental rights, and individual issues such as health, reading, and nutrition. Even more than functioning at the government level, the Commission serves as a tool for children to use their voices to advocate for themselves along with all other members of the community. The Commission is essentially the mediating variable between the residents and the government. This should be the most essential correspondence. Whether measuring in dollars saved or lives spared there is inevitable a benefit to keeping the Commission. Prevention is always the less expensive route than addressing crisis. It costs less to work to prevent disparities than it does to cover the cost of housing incarcerated juveniles and correctional facilities. Healthy kids are less expensive than covering the cost after they become sick. The Commission advocates for parents to take care of kids by encouraging better nutrition, more exercise, and better health habits. As a result when fully implemented it will keep these kids out of hospitals for various reasons. Also, the policies under the Commission encourage increasing safety awareness to prevent accidents, parental responsibility, and safe streets and schools. Connecticut is only one of a mere handful of states that has such important services for youth such as the Commission for Children, so much so that they need to be recognized and embraced, not turned away from and eliminated.

Thank you for your time,



Aviva Vincent